

NOTE ON MR. GUY LE STRANGE'S PAPER ON "ANTIOCH
IN 1051 A.D.," PAGE 266, *QUARTERLY STATEMENT*,
OCTOBER, 1888.

The "shell (*sadafah*) which screens the altar (in the church) of Al Kusyan" is probably an altar screen inlaid with mother-of-pearl, *Sadaf* being still the word in common use in Syria for mother-of-pearl. The shells are obtained from the Red Sea, chiefly by Bethlehem traders. Mother-of-pearl has long been used in the inlaid work of Syria. There are some fine specimens of mother-of-pearl and tortoiseshell inlaid work in the church of St. James in the Armenian Convent at Jerusalem, and the inlaid pearl work of Damascus is well known. According to Ibn Butlân, the Haikal or Sanctuary of the Church at Antioch appears to have been at the time of his visit (A.D. 1050) screened off from the nave by an inlaid mother-of-pearl screen surmounted by an iron cross, which had been struck in 1050, as he describes, by lightning during the great storm of April 13th (old style—therefore April 25th new style). This is late in the year for a heavy thunderstorm in Syria. He mentions the splitting off of the shell, *i.e.*, pearl inlaying, from the face of the screen, the melting of the silver chain of the censer, and the throwing down of a silver crown which hung before the table of the altar. (It is worthy of notice that the writer throughout speaks of "the table of the altar.")

It is interesting to compare the arrangements here described with those to be found to this day in the Western Syrian churches in Syria and Mesopotamia, and those of the Eastern Syrians (in the Nestorian Mountains)—all have the Haikal or Sanctuary to the east, with its "altar table." In the churches of the Western Syrians the Sanctuary is separated by a veil or curtain which hangs between two pillars. The Eastern Syrians have in their churches a thick wall separating nave from Sanctuary.

Censers are used by both the Eastern and Western Syrians.

Both still have three small tables (called "stools" in Mr. Guy le Strange's translation) at the top of the nave just before the Sanctuary. The Western Syrians use the one at each side (north and south) for the service books, and the middle one for the book of the Old Testament lessons, while beyond it, within the Sanctuary at the top of the step, is a fourth table for the Book of the Gospels. The Western Syrians have two candles placed on the "altar table," which are lighted if there is not daylight enough. These candles must not be made of animal fat, nor must any book bound in the skin of an animal be laid on the "altar table."

The Rev. Dr. Cutts describes the Church of the Eastern Syrians (Nestorians or Assyrians) at Kochanes, where he saw three small tables in front of and below the chancel screen—that on the south for the anthem books, and a rude chandelier, is called the Altar of Prayers; that on

the north is called the Altar of the Gospels, for the Book of the Gospels and a cross laid upon it, and the middle small one has a cross laid upon it.

Ibn Butlân not only gives his dates in Moslem reckoning (of the Hejrah) but also according to the era of Alexander the Great, and I have found that to this day the Syrian Christians use the Macedonian era of Alexander, whose influence was so greatly felt, as well as that of his successors in the provinces of North and Eastern Syria.

The daughter church of St. Thomas' Christians on the Malabar coast also still use the Macedonian era.

It is highly probable that Ibn Butlân (a native of Bagdad) was a member of the ancient Syrian Church, whose home is still in Mesopotamia. The Syrian Christians hold that their Church was founded by the Apostles Paul and Peter—the latter having been their first Bishop and Patriarch. Antioch has long been in ruins; its glories have departed; its gardens, groves, myrtle-heated baths, its countless churches, ornamented with gold and silver and coloured glass, and floors paved in squares (*tesseræ*); its hospital for the sick, and its audit office for the church accounts, where ten or more accountants were kept daily busy—all are gone. First, Greek, and then Moslem invaders drove away the Syrian Christians; next came the Latin Crusading armies, and the final triumph of the Moslem power. Antioch fell, and until lately there were no Christians at all to be found there. There are now a few Greek Christians who live among the Moslem inhabitants; but none of the ancient Syrian Church. Still, though driven away eastwards, the Syrian nation and Church have not ceased to exist. They found a refuge among the highlands of Upper Mesopotamia, whither, to the fortress city of Mardin, the Syrian Patriarch of Antioch removed his seat, and where his successors have to this day cared for their sorely oppressed people. Here, far beyond the ken of ordinary travellers, the Syrian people still speak the ancient Aramaic tongue and keep up their primitive usages and the customs of their Church. The Patriarch, Ignatius Peter III, visited England fourteen years ago at the invitation of the late Archbishop Tait, and was accompanied by Mar Gregorius, Syrian Bishop of Jerusalem. The latter is in England now, having again been invited to this country.

From these Prelates we have derived much valuable information as to the past history and present condition of the Syrian, the oldest Gentile Christian Church in the world. By them, probably for the first time in history, has been used in this country in speaking and in writing the ancient Aramaic as a still living language.

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